

ECCLESIASTES

INTRODUCTION

Solomon is the writer. This fact is very well established among conservative expositors, and there is no other reasonable explanation for the book.

Solomon also wrote the Books of Proverbs and the Song of Solomon. We will find Ecclesiastes to be quite different from the Book of Proverbs. In Proverbs we saw the wisdom of Solomon; here we shall see the foolishness of Solomon. Ecclesiastes is the dramatic autobiography of his life when he was away from God.

Ecclesiastes indicates a preacher or a philosopher. I rather like the term philosopher because it is less likely to be misunderstood.

To correctly understand any book of the Bible, it is important to know the purpose for which it was written. We need to back off and get a perspective of the book. We need to put down the telescope on the Word of God before we pick up the microscope. The necessity for this is more evident here than in many of the other books of the Bible.

This is human philosophy apart from God, which must always reach the conclusions that this book reaches. We need to understand this about Ecclesiastes because there are many statements which contradict certain other statements of Scripture.

Actually, it almost frightens us to know that this book has been the favorite of atheists, and they have quoted from it profusely. Voltaire is an example. Today we find the cynic and the critic are apt to quote from this book. And it is quite interesting to note the number of cults that use passages from this book out of context and give them an entirely wrong meaning.

Man has tried to be happy without God; it is being tried every day by millions of people. This book shows the absurdity of the attempt. Solomon was the wisest of men, and he had a wisdom that was God-given. He tried every field of endeavor and pleasure that was known to man, and his conclusion was that all is vanity. The word vanity means "empty, purposeless." Satisfaction in life can never be attained in this manner.

God showed Job, a righteous man, that he was a sinner in God's sight. In Ecclesiastes God showed Solomon, the wisest man, that he was a fool in God's sight. This is a book from which a great many professors, Ph.D.s and Th.D.s, and preachers could learn a great lesson. In spite of all their wisdom, in spite of all attempts at being intellectual, unregenerate men in the sight of God are fools. That, my friend, is something that is hard to swallow for those who put an emphasis upon their I.Q. and the amount of knowledge and information that they have accumulated.

In Ecclesiastes we learn that without Christ we cannot be satisfied -- even if we possess the whole world and all the things that men consider necessary to make their hearts content. The world cannot satisfy the heart because the heart is too large for the object. In the Song of Solomon, we will learn that if we turn from the world and set our affections

on Christ, we cannot fathom the infinite preciousness of His love; the Object is too large for the heart.

The key word is vanity, which occurs thirty-seven times. The key phrase is "under the sun," which occurs twenty-nine times. Another phrase which recurs is "I said in mine heart." In other words, this book contains the cogitations of man's heart. These are conclusions which men have reached through their own intelligence, their own experiments. Although Solomon's conclusions are not inspired, the Scripture that tells us about them is inspired. This is the reason for the explanatory: "I said in mine heart," "under the sun," and "vanity."

Outline

I. Problem Stated: "All Is Vanity," [Eccl. 1:1-3](#)

II. Experiment Made, [Eccl. 1:4](#) through [Eccl. 12:12](#)

(Seeking Satisfaction in the Following:)

- A. Science, [Eccl. 1:4-11](#)
- B. Wisdom and Philosophy, [Eccl. 1:12-18](#)
- C. Pleasure, [Eccl. 2:1-11](#)
- D. Materialism (Living for the "Now"), [Eccl. 2:12-26](#)
- E. Fatalism, [Eccl. 3:1-15](#)
- F. Egotism, [Eccl. 3:16](#) through [Eccl. 4:16](#)
- G. Religion, [Eccl. 5:1-8](#)
- H. Wealth, [Eccl. 5:9](#) through [Eccl. 6:12](#)
- I. Morality, [Eccl. 7:1](#) through [Eccl. 12:12](#)

III. Result of Experiment, [Eccl. 12:13-14](#)

Chapter 1

The Book of Ecclesiastes is a dramatic autobiography of King Solomon's life when he was away from God. As the Book of Proverbs reveals Solomon's wisdom, the Book of Ecclesiastes reveals his foolishness.

This is not a book without rhyme or reason -- not just a bunch of verses stuck together. It begins with the problem stated: All is vanity in this world. Then we will find that experiments are made. Solomon will seek satisfaction through many different avenues, in many different fields. He will try science, the laws of nature, wisdom and philosophy, pleasure and materialism, as well as living for the "now." He will explore fatalism, egotism, religion, wealth, and morality. Then in the final verses of the book he will give us the result of his experiments.

Keep in mind that the conclusions in each experiment are human, not God's truth. This is man under the sun.

Do not misunderstand what is meant by "inspiration" when we say that the Bible is inspired by God. Inspiration guarantees the accuracy of the words of Scripture, not always the thought that is expressed. The context should be considered, and attention

paid to the person who made the statement and under what circumstances the statement was made. For example, in the betrayal of Christ by Judas, the record of the event is inspired, but the act of Judas was not God-inspired; it was satanic. Also the statements that Solomon makes, while he is searching for satisfaction apart from God, are not always in accord with God's thoughts. Inspiration guarantees that what Solomon said has been accurately recorded in Scripture.

Problem Stated (1:1-3)

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem
[[Eccl. 1:1](#)].

That description doesn't fit anyone except Solomon, as far as I can tell. David did have other sons, but Solomon was the only one who was king in Jerusalem. He is the philosopher here. We know that he had been given wisdom.

I think that the wisdom God gave Solomon was a little different from what we think it was. We imagine that he was given spiritual insight, but Scripture does not tell us that he even asked for that. He had prayed: "Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?" ([1Kings 3:9](#), italics mine). Apparently God gave him what he asked for: wisdom to rule. He was wise in political economy and probably did a marvelous job of ruling the nation. He brought in an era of peace. Other nations of the world went there to study and to behold the wisdom of Solomon. He gave a testimony for God through the temple with the altar where sacrifice was made for sinners. These were some of the things that the Queen of Sheba learned when she came from the ends of the earth. But in the area of spiritual discernment, Solomon was probably nil.

Now we find Solomon, away from God, launching out with his experiments "under the sun." The man under the sun is a great deal different from the child of God who has been blessed ". . . with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" ([Eph. 1:3](#)).

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity [[Eccl. 1:2](#)].

"Vanity" here speaks of emptiness. It is to waste life without any purpose or any goal. It means to live like an animal or a bird lives. There are a great many people who live like that.

I was in a hotel in the Hawaiian Islands where the jet set come. They fly all over the world spending a few days or weeks in Hawaii, then at Acapulco in Mexico, and then the Riviera in France, then to Spain, North Africa, South Africa, and so on. They are world travelers. I watched these folk and listened to their conversation at the dinner table, out in the hotel lobby, and in the elevators. The thing that impressed me about them was how purposeless their lives really are. They talked about people they had seen in other places. They talked about plays they had seen. They would ask, "Where are you going from here?" Someone would say, "Wasn't that place where we went last year a bore!" There was no aim, no goal, no purpose in life. This is also the conclusion of Solomon. Vanity of vanities. Emptiness of emptiness. It is just like a big bag of nothing.

Solomon in the Book of Proverbs gives us gems of wisdom. In Ecclesiastes he gives us globules, not of wisdom, but of folly. Then in the Song of Solomon love is the subject. Wisdom, foolishness, and love -- Solomon was an expert in all three fields. He knew how to play the fool; he was wise in government; and his love life was quite a story. Solomon was the wisest of men, but no man ever played the fool more thoroughly than he did. He is the riddle of revelation. He is the paradox of Scripture. The wisest man was the greatest fool. The Book of Ecclesiastes will reveal this.

"Vanity of vanities; all is vanity" is life without God. It is man walking and talking "under the sun," trying to get something out of life.

There is another class of people whom I meet in motels and hotels as I travel. These are the conventioneers. This is the day of conventions. I have listened to them and watched them. They are different from the jet set, but they, too, are looking for something. They have the big cocktail party or beer bust. Then they have a huge banquet with a big show. They try it all, but there is that note of bitterness. There are dregs left in the glass of life.

Now we will find man experimenting. He is going to squeeze the juice of life out of the dry rocks of this mundane existence down here.

What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? [Eccl. 1:3].

Let's keep in mind this is "under the sun"; it is man's viewpoint. God is not giving His viewpoint here.

Experiment Made (1:1-3)

His experiments comprise the body of the book, extending from [verse 4](#) through chapter 12, [verse 12](#).

Now the first thing he tries is in the realm of science. He makes a study of the laws of nature. It is interesting that Solomon tried this. Men today still go into the scientific fields of study and spend years, in fact a lifetime, studying these laws of nature. This book is remarkable in giving us these laws of nature.

Science (1:4-11)

One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever [Eccl. 1:4].

The earth "abideth for ever" and has a stability that man does not have because man is temporary. Contemporary man is a little different from the man of the past and probably he will be a great deal different from the man of the future, but man is temporary. The continuity of mankind is maintained through births. Most of us were not here a hundred years ago, and we will not be here a hundred years from today. In fact, many of us won't be around much longer. However, mankind will continue through succeeding generations. Solomon has noted that: "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh." Man is a transitory creature. Looking at life in terms of this life only, man is the most colossal failure in God's universe. He has been around only a few years. There are redwood trees in Northern California that were here when Christ was on earth,

but they are newcomers compared to rocks around us which geologists tell us have been here millions, maybe billions of years. Although no one knows how long the earth has been here, it was here before man got here, and it will be here after most of us leave. My friend, this adds a certain dimension to life that is rather discouraging and disappointing. Man is not what he thinks he is.

Now we see some very remarkable statements. Here is a revelation that Solomon made a study of the laws of nature and knew a great deal about them. It is quite interesting that these are basic in our day as far as science is concerned.

The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.

The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again [[Eccl. 1:5-7](#)].

It is very interesting that these accurate observations come from the days of Solomon. Dr. Arthur T. Pierson comments on this fact:

There is a danger in pressing the words in the Bible into a positive announcement of scientific fact, so marvelous are some of these correspondencies. But it is certainly a curious fact that Solomon should use language entirely consistent with discoveries such as evaporation and storm currents ([vv. 6-7](#)). Some have boldly said that Redfield's theory of storms is here explicitly stated. Without taking such ground, we ask, who taught Solomon to use terms that readily accommodate facts that the movement of the winds which seem to be so lawless and uncertain, are ruled by laws as positive as those which rule the growth of the plant; and that by evaporation, the waters that fall on the earth are continually rising again, so that the sea never overflows? [Ecclesiastes 12:6](#) is a poetic description of death. How the "silver cord" describes the spinal marrow, the "golden bowl" the basin which holds the brain, the "pitcher" the lungs, and the "wheel" the heart. Without claiming that Solomon was inspired to foretell the circulation of the blood, twenty-six centuries before Harvey announced it, is it not remarkable that the language he uses exactly suits the facts -- a wheel pumping up through one pipe to discharge through another?

There are three very interesting statements in [verses 5-7](#).

1. "The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down." There is a monotony in nature, but also that which you can depend upon. You can count on the sun coming up and you can depend on it going down -- we still use that terminology although we know that the coming up and going down of the sun really is caused by the rotation of the earth. We are standing on a pretty solid piece of earth, and it looks to us as if the sun comes up and the sun goes down. The terminology has accommodated man in all ages. The amazing thing is the precise, regular way that the sun appears and disappears; it is obeying certain laws.

2. "The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about the north." Today we know that the wind follows certain patterns. Even with our modern gadgets we are not able to predict it well enough to forecast the weather as we would like to. Here in Southern California where we have a monotony of good weather, the weatherman misses the exact prediction about half the time. I have watched this very carefully over the years. The Lord Jesus said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth" -- that is, where it wants to blow. It is blowing according to laws. "And thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth . . ." ([John 3:8](#)) -- we can't tell where it is coming from and where it is going. As I am making this study of Ecclesiastes, we have had quite a bit of disturbance across the country. Here in Southern California we never get rain in June or July or August -- but we've been having showers! I couldn't believe it when I got in my car the other night and had to use the windshield wipers. The weatherman tells us that there is a low pressure here and a high pressure there. There is movement; winds are blowing. "The wind bloweth where it listeth." Or, as Solomon put it, "The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north." At one place the wind is moving south and in another it is moving north. In Arizona they even had flooding in desert communities, all because of the wind. It is obeying certain laws as it is blowing. How did Solomon know that? He didn't have the gadgets which we have nor the background on which to base his conclusions.

3. "All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full." Solomon is tacitly speaking of the law of evaporation, of the elevation of moisture into the air. Then the wind comes along, blows that moisture over the land, and it pours out on the earth. The whole process follows certain definite, specific laws. There is nothing haphazard happening, although we may think so. Including [verse 4](#), we have four remarkable statements concerning the laws of nature that make sense and fit right into what men know today. Compare this with other writings that come from one thousand years before Christ. You will find a great deal of false conclusions and superstitions in contrast to the accuracy you find in the Word of God.

Here is another remarkable observation --

All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing [[Eccl. 1:8](#)].

This may not have seemed true before, but since the advent of television it is obvious. Many people watch television for hours day after day. Why? Because the eye is never satisfied with seeing; the ear is never filled with hearing. Most of us love to go to new places and see new scenes. This is one of the enjoyments of life. It is one of the things we can enjoy in this big, wonderful country. I get kidded because I come from Texas, but I must say in all honesty that I have never been in a state that I didn't like. They are all wonderful. We live in a wonderful country and in a wonderful universe.

Man cannot exhaust the exploration of the universe. The more he learns, the more he sees that he should learn. The more he learns, the more he sees how much more there is to learn. This is frustrating. The physical universe is too big for little man. Yet man alone of all God's creatures -- as far as we know -- is able to comprehend the universe. When a dog bays at the moon, I don't think he knows the distance to the moon, and I don't think he cares. I don't think he recognizes that he lives in a vast universe. I believe that the

world of a dog is a very small world. It is no bigger than a bone most of the time. But the eyes and ears of man are never satisfied; he wants to explore.

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us [[Eccl. 1:9-10](#)].

People think we have come up with something new when we have manufactured a new gadget. I remember what a novelty the telephone was. In West Texas we were on a party line, and when the telephone would ring, you could hear a dozen receivers being taken off the hook. That was the best way to make a public announcement in those days! You say, "Well, television is new, how can it be said that there is nothing new under the sun?" Let me illustrate this.

My grandfather courted my grandmother on an old horsehair sofa in a very staid living room in Mississippi. He proposed to her there. She accepted, and they were married. My dad courted my mother on a train -- he met her in a day coach. They traveled by horse and buggy to Tyler, Texas, where they were married. I proposed to my wife down in Texas, as we were sitting in a car. My little grandson may propose to his wife in an airplane or maybe even in a space capsule. You may ask, "Isn't that new?" No, not really. The feeling that my granddad had when his proposal was accepted is the same feeling that I had, and I don't think my little grandson will feel any differently. There is really nothing new under the sun. The environment may change, and there may be new gadgets around, but there really is nothing new under the sun. Man stays the same. Only the stage setting may vary a bit from age to age.

It is said that the atom bomb is new, but the atom has been around for a long time. Actually, the atom is older than man, although man did not know it existed during all that time. All man has accomplished is to make the little atom a very difficult neighbor. The nosy human should have let sleeping dogs lie, but we probe around. Perhaps you are asking, "Well, isn't the computer new?" Not really. God created us with computer brains and electric nervous systems. A mechanical computer brings to man no deep and abiding satisfaction. Man has learned that none of these gadgets contributes anything really new to him.

There is one exception. There is one thing that is new -- the New Birth. This is something that comes when you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior. This, my friend, is about the only thing new that will come your way.

There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after [[Eccl. 1:11](#)].

Solomon had tried to find satisfaction in the study of science, but he had to come to this conclusion. Man tries to be important. He tries everything in the world to keep himself before the public, but it isn't long until he passes off the stage. "There is no remembrance of former things."

Do you remember who were the popular entertainers of fifty years ago? Do you remember the popular athletes of fifty years ago? Could you name the president of the United States of fifty years ago? Our memories aren't very long. The Scripture says that we spend our time down here as a tale that is told and we can't go back over it again.

You see, this man Solomon is making tremendous experiments, and he is making them in the laboratory of life. He is trying everything that is available to man. In his day and position he was able to go into any field that he chose. Not many men today would be able to do what Solomon did. He first gave himself to the study of the laws of nature, as we have seen, but he found nothing he could learn in nature or in science which was new in the sense that it would bring new life to him.

Solomon's next experimentation will be in the area of wisdom and philosophy.

Wisdom And Philosophy (1:12-18)

I the Preacher was King over Israel in Jerusalem.

And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith [[Eccl. 1:12-13](#)].

Solomon spent a lot of time studying the philosophy of the world. He lived nearly a thousand years before Christ, and since we live two thousand years on this side, three thousand years have elapsed. Man has come up with a great deal of gadgetry in that time, but actually man doesn't know any more about philosophy and wisdom than he knew three thousand years ago. There has been no improvement in philosophy and wisdom, neither do they satisfy the heart.

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit [[Eccl. 1:14](#)].

All systems of philosophy lead up a blind alley. You can make the same experiment yourself. You can spend your time in studying this subject, and you will find it is actually a waste of time.

We are living in a day when educators are declaring that all the past methods of education were just a waste of time. I wonder how good our present method is. I think that it is also a waste of time. Man can never learn the really important thing -- he cannot know God by wisdom and philosophy. His knowledge of God comes only through revelation.

Philosophy generally leads a person to a pessimistic viewpoint of life.

You cannot take natural man -- man who is a lost sinner alienated from God -- and give him an education, expecting that education to solve the problems of his life. It will not do that. Philosophy and psychology cannot change human nature, nor can they correct the old nature of man.

That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered [[Eccl. 1:15](#)].

"That which is crooked cannot be made straight" -- as the twig is bent, the tree inclines. The tree grows crooked because the twig was bent. You and I start out in life with an old

nature. We can educate it and do many things to improve it, but, as the Lord Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." It will always be flesh, my friend. That is the reason we must have a new nature -- ". . . that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" ([John 3:6](#)).

For a time we thought that education would solve the problems of life. Now higher education, in fact all education, is coming under the scrutiny of a great many thoughtful people. A committee to study higher education has come up with a novel explanation of our present conditions. They say the rebellion and the general immorality in our schools is taking place because the young people today are more inquiring and more interested in politics and what is happening in their world. I agree that people are more aware of the many terrible things that are happening. The media gather news from the four corners of the earth and broadcast it the same evening. This makes us more aware of what takes place in the world than ever before. There was a time when it took six weeks to complete all the information after an election; so it took that long to find out who had been elected president. Today they can tell you who is going to be elected before they have the election! So I agree with the fact that young people are more aware today. But I heartily disagree with the implication that the things happening on our campuses are actually an improvement because the young people are so well informed. There is a deterioration on our campuses. We have come to the day when evil is called good, and good evil. Only an educated man could come up with the conclusion that the deterioration on campuses is not deterioration but actually improvement! If you believe fairy stories, you may want to believe that, but we need to face reality. Education cannot solve the problems of life. Neither can psychology provide the answer. In our day there are clever men and women who have come up with little psychological clichés to explain and solve the problems of life. They coat them with a little Bible, like a bitter pill that is covered with a sugar coating, to make them appear as the biblical solutions. My friend, the Word of God in its entirety contains for the Christians the answers to the problems of life. There are no easy solutions. Studying the Word of God requires a great deal of time and effort and mental "perspiration." Oh, how that is needed among Christians!

Solomon discovered that wisdom and philosophy did not provide the answers to the problems of life.

[I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge \[Eccl. 1:16\].](#)

I believe that Solomon was led to a certain amount of arrogance, a certain amount of conceit, since he was wiser than the others. Paul writes that "Knowledge puffeth up . . ." ([1Cor. 8:1](#)). It can inflate an individual like a balloon if he feels that he is a little smarter or better educated than those around him. Remember that education is based on experience, and experience cannot be trusted. Experience must be tested by the Word of God. Unfortunately, many folk today are testing the Word of God by their experience. My friend, if your experience is contrary to the Bible, then it is your experience, not the Word of God, which is wrong.

And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit [Eccl. 1:17].

"To know madness and folly" -- it is interesting that wisdom and playing the fool are not very far apart. Many smart men in the history of the world have played the fool. Solomon is the notable example of that. King James of England, the one for whom our King James Version of the Bible is named, certainly was not capable of translating. He was called James the fool, because that's what he was, although he thought he was a very smart individual.

Our nation has produced a generation that thinks it is very intelligent and very smart. Yet we cannot even solve the problems that are about us, much less the problems of the world. Solomon gave his heart to know wisdom and also to know madness and folly. He did both.

"I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit." In other words, it was not worth the effort.

For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow [Eccl. 1:18].

Joy and satisfaction do not increase in ratio to the increase of knowledge. Someone has said that when ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise. There is a certain amount of truth in that. In much wisdom there is much grief. The more we know, the more we increase our problems. Life has become more tedious, has produced more tensions, and all of our scientific gadgets about us are making life almost unbearable. A Christian friend said to me the other day, "I think I will lose my mind if I don't get away from these computers that are controlling life today. The machines that we think are so wonderful and practically worship are drowning us in pollution and driving us to madness." How accurate Solomon was in saying "in much wisdom is much grief," and Solomon did not live in the machine age. He did not see the industrial revolution, but he knew what he was talking about.

Chapter 2

In this chapter we will find Solomon following another course to find satisfaction in life. This is a popular route for modern man who seeks satisfaction in pleasure.

Pleasure (2:1-11)

I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity [Eccl. 2:1].

Solomon probably tried everything known in the way of pleasure. We are a sex-mad people. And what do we have to show for it? Well, we certainly have low morals, and we have venereal disease in epidemic proportions. Today the church has entered the field also. I suppose most pastors have a sermon on sex; some of them have a whole series. There are many who feel that the church should have a course to teach our young people about sex. I think that is a tragic mistake. This generation is getting sex right up to their

ears -- all they need and more. Now Solomon was an expert in the area of sex. He had one thousand wives and concubines, and they were all available to him. A man who had a thousand women around him is some sort of an expert. Solomon tried that way to seek satisfaction. Also he went in for drinking and for entertainment. I suppose he could have put on a performance that would make Las Vegas look like it was penny ante or just a sideshow in a small circus. Solomon went all out for pleasure. "I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure." But notice his conclusion: "Behold, this also is vanity" -- empty.

I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it? [[Eccl. 2:2](#)].

He probably had a comedian or a court jester to entertain him and tell him the latest jokes -- probably many of them questionable. He said, "I found this to be a great waste of time."

I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life [[Eccl. 2:3](#)].

"Under the heaven" -- remember that Solomon is a man probing and making experiments apart from God.

I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards [[Eccl. 2:4](#)].

These were hobbies with Solomon. Even today the ruins of the stables of Solomon can be seen right in Jerusalem and in several other places. At Megiddo a tourist guide will show you ruins of the troughs where the horses ate. Solomon had stables all over that land, although the Mosaic Law had expressly forbidden a king to multiply horses.

I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits:

I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees [[Eccl. 2:5-6](#)].

He had irrigation.

I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me [[Eccl. 2:7](#)].

He had a ranch out at the edge of town where he raised cattle. You may be wondering how he could afford all this. Well, Solomon had cornered the gold in his day. He had plenty of spending money, and he built in all the comforts of life.

It is now known that snow was brought down from Mount Hermon so that he could have cold drinks in the summertime. I think Solomon tried everything that a man could try for pleasure. I doubt that modern man could have anything that Solomon did not have.

I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts [Eccl. 2:8].

He brought in the best nightclub acts from Las Vegas. He had all kinds of music -- from symphony to rock, but it didn't satisfy his heart.

So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.

And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour [Eccl. 2:9-10].

Mrs. McGee and I are out in conferences a great deal of the time. In the evenings after a service we need to get away from everyone for a while, and one of the things we like to do is just go walking through a shopping area. I have said to her, "Would you like sometime to be able to buy everything that you see and want?" She answered that she wondered how it would feel to be able to do that. Well, Solomon did just that. Anything his little heart desired, he bought. As he looked out upon this world, there was nothing that it withheld from him.

You would think that all men in that position would be happy. Well, I don't know why, but they are not. I am told that we have more suicides here in Southern California than the average for the country. One would think it would be the bums on skid row, the down-and-outers, who would be the ones to commit suicide. Life certainly wouldn't seem to be worth much to them. Actually, those are not the ones with the high suicide rate. It is the rich, the famous, the Hollywood movie and television stars, the folk who seem to have made it. They are the ones who commit suicide. Why? They have come to the same conclusion that Solomon did. He had tried everything in the way of pleasure and concluded:

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun [Eccl. 2:11].

What a statement from a man who had everything! A great many people will not take Solomon's word for it; they have to make the same experiments -- although not to the extent that Solomon did. Eventually they arrive at the same conclusion. They say, "Life is empty." Solomon said, "All was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."

Throughout the remainder of this chapter Solomon moves into another area. I wish I had a better word for it, but I simply call it materialism.

Materialism (2:12-26)

This is living for the now, and this should be understood by the people today because we say we are the "now generation." It is a materialistic concept. It is a living for the here

and now, living for self, selfishness. Each of these words describes a facet of this type of living.

And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done [Eccl. 2:12].

In other words, no one could live it up more than Solomon did. He said they would have to repeat what he had done and would find it very monotonous.

Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness [Eccl. 2:13].

It is better to be a wise man than to be a fool. It is better to be an educated man than to be an ignorant man.

The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all [Eccl. 2:14].

"The wise man's eyes are in his head" -- I've heard my parents and my school teachers say to me, "Use your mind. Use your head. Use your eyes." That is what Solomon is saying. A wise man uses his head and his eyes, but "the fool walketh in darkness."

"I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all." Regardless of how smart you are, you don't really get too far away from the fool, because you both are going to be carried out feet forward and laid to rest somewhere. You both will end up in the same way.

Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity [Eccl. 2:15].

You would think that a smart fellow would find another way out. "Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity." It is interesting that modern man with all his tremendous inventions and scientific advances has not been able to extend human life very long. Oh, I know that the average life span has been extended by ten years or more. But put that ten years down by a thousand years, or put it down beside eternity, and what do you have? You don't even have a second on the clock of eternity, my friend. Man really hasn't done very much for himself here on this earth.

For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool [Eccl. 2:16].

They die just the same way.

You may be innately intelligent. You may have a high I.Q. You may have been educated, even have several doctoral degrees, but none of this will help you when it is your time to die. Neither will any of that stop you from dying. When it is your time to go out the door, you will go, and there is nothing in this world that can keep you from it.

Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit [Eccl. 2:17].

Let me repeat: Vanity means that which is empty, meaningless, purposeless. With "all the work that is wrought under the sun" what has been done?

Thomas A. Edison is an example. He worked in a laboratory and developed many things such as the electric light bulb and the Victrola. All of our recording instruments really go back to the work of Edison. He was a genius, but he died just like everyone else. What good did it do him after all?

His laboratory is preserved in Fort Myers, Florida. If you are ever down there, it is worth the time to visit the Edison home and laboratory. He worked in that laboratory day and night. He had insomnia of the worst kind, so he had a little bed in his lab where he would lie down for little naps. He worked day and night, trying out many, many things that never worked out at all. I don't get the impression that life was a thrill for him. I think that Thomas A. Edison found life very boring.

Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me [Eccl. 2:18].

I have to go off and leave all of this someday. Have you ever stopped to think about that? What good is it going to do you? Oh, how many folk have worked all their lives to accumulate a little of this world's goods, then they leave it to some godless relative. Some folk intend to leave it to a Christian organization so that their money can propagate the Gospel after they are gone, but have you ever stopped to think how many Christian organizations have become apostate and have departed from teaching the Word of God?

For example, Mr. John Harvard, who founded Harvard University, was a fundamental believer, and he left his money to propagate the fundamental Christian faith. Today you wouldn't find fundamental faith within ten yards of Harvard. They have departed from the faith. The money which Mr. Harvard left has come to be used for the very opposite of what he intended.

People today leave money to so-called Christian organizations, but they have no assurance that the organizations will remain true to the faith.

We know that Solomon faced this same kind of problem, and [1Kings 12](#) tells us what happened. He left the kingdom to his son, and it was his son's foolish arrogance that divided the kingdom. What a tragedy that was.

And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity [Eccl. 2:19].

Solomon saw that it was a waste of time to work for something and then to turn it all over to a fool.

Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun [Eccl. 2:20].

Notice again that this is "under the sun." It is the view of the man apart from God. This is not the man in Christ seated in the heavenly places of [Ephesians 2:6](#). This view under the sun always leads to pessimism.

For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity [Eccl. 2:23].

Solomon found out that it didn't do any good to worry about it because there was nothing he could do about it.

There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.

For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I?

For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit [Eccl. 2:24-26].

If you are living just for self -- whether you are God's man or an unregenerate sinner -- it will come to naught. It will lead to bitterness in your heart, and you will be holding nothing but dead leaves in your hands at the end.

Chapter 3

In this chapter we see that Solomon adopts a certain philosophy of life known as fatalism. This was common among pagans; Buddhism is a fatalistic system; Platonism is fatalism. In our day certain cults give the impression of having a glorious faith in God, but actually the "faith" is fatalism.

The philosophy of fatalism is very popular in modern America. It is my custom to conclude my Bible conferences on Thursday evenings and fly back home on Fridays. On Friday afternoons I board a plane in some distant city and find myself with almost 100 percent male passengers. Who are they? Well, they are married men for the most part who are salesmen or representatives of certain companies. Their families live here in Southern California, and every Friday they get on a plane to come home. Most of them are tired. Their faces show the effect of a week's work. Many of them who are carrying attaché cases will open them up and begin to work out a final report to hand in at the office if they get back in time. Or they will probably put it in the mail when they get home so it will be there for the president of the company to see on Monday. They take their drinks, and after they have their cocktails, they begin to laugh. I can sense that it is the liquor that is laughing. Every now and then, if I sit by one of them and there is an exchange of viewpoints, I find out that they have a fatalistic viewpoint of life.

On one occasion I came home on a plane that passed through some very rough weather. The man next to me looked unconcerned. I said to him, "You didn't seem to be frightened

when we went through that bad weather." His response was, "No, there's no use being frightened. What is going to be will be. You can't change it. If it's time for your number to come up -- there's nothing you can do about it." There he sat, gritting his teeth with a philosophy of life that is very popular. It is called many things, but basically it is fatalism. A great many folk are facing life with that viewpoint.

Fatalism (3:1-14)

Now we find Solomon seeking satisfaction in fatalism.

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace [Eccl. 3:1-8].

This is Solomon's viewpoint as he expresses it. In our day we hear the expression, "Take life as it comes."

There is "a time to get, and a time to lose." You played the stock market, and you lost your money. Well, that's the way it was to be.

You were a traveling man away from home, and a certain woman was easy to get, and you invited her up to your room. Your philosophy was that there is "a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing." Taking life as it comes is a philosophy of fatalism.

What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?
[Eccl. 3:9].

What's the use? Why fight it? If you can't fight them, join them. That is the kind of clich  that is bandied about among men today. This is the way men operate, especially godless men in the business world. Money is made on this kind of basis.

I think that you will find that men who live like this are not filled with joy. They are difficult to live with. I imagine their wives have real problems. They have a cocktail in the evening, and then they become sociable for several hours. After that it is better to stay out of their way.

I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it [Eccl. 3:10].

Solomon has looked around -- "I see people in trouble everywhere; so if I've escaped a little of it, I just consider myself lucky -- that's all."

He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end [Eccl. 3:11].

God has allowed men to "set the world in their heart" so they will see that the world does not satisfy -- their hearts are still empty. Many men start out with the philosophy that they are going to get all they can out of life. They say, "Life is like an orange, and I'm going to squeeze it for all its worth." Solomon did that, but it didn't satisfy him at all.

I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life [Eccl. 3:12].

There is another group in this crowd: the do-gooders. A man on a plane said to me, "Well, I think a man ought to do good as much as he can. That's what I try to do." Let me tell you that he wasn't doing much good, but that was his philosophy of life.

And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God [Eccl. 3:13].

This fellow said, "I see nothing wrong in drinking." And from his point of view, there wasn't anything wrong. This is the fatalism of modern man.

I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him [Eccl. 3:14].

They talk about God's will as primary, but with this viewpoint a man will say, "If it's not God's will for me to be saved, I won't be saved." You see, fatalism leaves no place for the mercy and grace of God. Fatalism says that God does not hear and answer prayer. My friend, it is God's grace and mercy and love that make life exciting and bring joy into life and give peace to the human heart.

We come to another philosophy at this point, which we call egotism or egoism. It is excessive love of self; an individual's self-interest is the summum bonum of life.

Egotism (3:16-22)

And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there [Eccl. 3:16].

He is saying that all men are wicked. You can't trust anybody. This is a cynical, although I must confess a rather accurate, viewpoint of the human race.

I was speaking at a conference at which the director said, "Now we want to treat all of you folk who are here as Christian ladies and gentlemen." That was the last thing he should have done, because they didn't act like ladies and gentlemen, I assure you.

A friend of mine says that when some men do business, they trust the other individual until he proves himself untrustworthy. He says that he has learned to treat people as crooks until they prove that they are not. Now that is a cynical attitude. Unfortunately, it is reasonably accurate, and I must say that my friend is a successful businessman. He faces the reality as God has said it: ". . . All have sinned . . ." ([Rom. 3:23](#)).

Solomon goes on in this vein of thought --

I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked:
for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.

I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that
God might manifest them, and that they might see that they
themselves are beasts [[Eccl. 3:17-18](#)].

That's not very encouraging!

For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one
thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea,
they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence
above a beast: for all is vanity.

All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again
[[Eccl. 3:19-20](#)].

You recognize, I am sure, that there are several cults which build on this statement.
However, we must remember that this is the viewpoint of man under the sun, living for
self-interest.

Living for self, enjoying life for self, is the reason men get involved in some projects
which are good. For example, many men get interested in athletics and give themselves to
it. Others give themselves to art, others to literature, others to music, and many different
things. These things are not wrong, but they are selfish; they gratify man's selfish desires.

This viewpoint does not accept the optimist's conclusion. You see, evolution says that
man was a beast but that he now has become a man. Egoism or egotism or self-interest
says that man is a beast, which causes the individual to despise others. This philosophy
produced the caste system in India and the class system in other parts of the world. It
leads to vanity and the feeling of being better than the other man. It has a pessimistic
viewpoint of death: man dies as an animal dies. I heard a man say, "Man dies just like a
dog dies. When you're dead, you're dead -- and that's all there is to it." Since he expects to
die like an animal dies, he is going to live for himself in this life and get all he can out of
it. This type of teaching is in the contemporary schoolroom. Evolution is a form of it,
although it says man was a beast, and this says man is a beast. It is only a difference of
time periods. Both agree that you are going to die like an animal, that you have no soul
nor spirit; so you might as well live like an animal.

It is interesting to observe animal behavior with this in mind. I watched a family of little
kittens the other day. Believe me, they had no regard for each other. They played together
all right, but when food was given to them, they didn't mind pushing one little fellow out.
The owner of the cats had to personally feed that little kitten -- his brothers and sisters

would have been perfectly willing to let him starve to death. Don't they have any compassion? No. Their egoism is their philosophy of life. You see little birds in a nest acting the same way. Each little fellow is taking care of himself. That is the viewpoint of the animal world. The reason man is beginning to react like an animal is because he is being taught in our schools that he is an animal.

Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? [Eccl. 3:21].

Solomon recognizes that man is different from the beast, for the spirit of man goes upward while the spirit of the beast goes downward -- because he is only an animal.

Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him? [Eccl. 3:22].

In other words, this life is all we are going to get. Again, this is a modern teaching -- call it whatever you wish -- that the only thing worthwhile is to identify oneself with his environment and live like an animal lives. By the way, this is the ancient version of the "hippie" philosophy which came out of our schools a few years ago.

Chapter 4

This chapter continues the record of Solomon's search for satisfaction through the philosophy of egotism.

So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter [Eccl. 4:1].

Does this sound to you like any political philosophy in modern America? The egoist rebels against the establishment. He is opposed to it. However, whatever system exists, whoever is ruling, the poor are oppressed. Frankly, the poor always get the bad deal -- there is no question about that. They are the ones who are oppressed. So the protest movements begin at this particular juncture.

Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive [Eccl. 4:2].

You have heard the expression: "I wish I were dead." Then, "I'd rather be red than dead" is just reversing it, but both are rebellion against the establishment. Death appears to hold no terror for him whatsoever.

Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun [Eccl. 4:3].

Here is the other side of the coin: It would be better for future generations if they were never born. "I wish I had never been born" is the way we hear it.

Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit [Eccl. 4:4].

It is interesting that the egoist rebels against the establishment, against the oppressor, against that which is wrong, but what about the man who is doing right? What about the man who is trying to do something about it? Well, he says that is no good either. It is a waste of time. This is really a pessimistic view of life!

The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh [Eccl. 4:5].

Does this mean a foolish man is a cannibal? No, it means that he is not willing to do anything to protect himself. He will not work for himself. We have developed quite a society like that today; people want everything given to them.

Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit [Eccl. 4:6].

Candidly, this is a very good point. Of course this man wants to do "his own thing," but I would say it is better to have it that way than to have the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.

Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun [Eccl. 4:7].

Anyway you go, it is wrong. There is no way out. This is the worst kind of pessimism. No wonder that campuses which major in an egoistic philosophy have the highest incidence of suicide. It is the old sore that has broken out in corruption. Behind all of it is the same pessimism of a philosophy of egoism which teaches that all comes to naught.

There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail [Eccl. 4:8].

What a picture this is! Even if you work for somebody else and help them, you are just wasting your time.

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour [Eccl. 4:9].

Now he is going to give some reasons for teaming up with someone else, but it will be a selfish reason -- you may be sure of that. He says that two are better than one "because they have a good reward for their labour." You'll be able to acquire more by teaming up with someone than by trying to do it alone.

For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up [Eccl. 4:10].

Solomon made the discovery that attempting to live just for yourself doesn't mean you can go it alone. You need someone to help you and stand with you. "Woe to him that is

alone when he falleth." That is the reason they tell us to team up if we go on a hike rather than going alone. In case of an accident it is well to have someone else around. This is a problem of the many retired folk who live alone. They may fall and break a hip and be unable to get to the telephone. Sometimes it is a day or two before a neighbor looks in on them. So it is better that two be together. If one falls, the other can render help.

Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? [Eccl. 4:11].

And then one member of a team can give warmth to the other member of the team. I remember as a little boy, I always liked to sleep with my dad in the wintertime because he would warm me up. It was cold. Ours was not a warm house, and we slept in rooms that were unheated. It made quite a difference to sleep with my dad.

And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken [Eccl. 4:12].

If two is company, then three is a crowd, and sometimes it is well to have a crowd, especially if someone is coming against you.

We have problems with crime on our streets today. Often it is the person who is alone who is the victim of crime. I am told that in Washington, D.C., a woman is not permitted to go alone to a public restroom. There must always be another to go along with her. It is tragic that we live in such a day. In spite of what the liberals say, we are in need of law and order in our day. The Bible teaches clearly that unregenerate man has a sinful nature. It should be obvious that "civilized" man has not lost his sinful nature and needs restraint rather than liberty. The liberty being exercised in our day is the liberty to hold people up on the street, liberty to mug them, liberty to make obscene calls, liberty to blare out music that only one or two people want to hear, liberty to express oneself in any way. My friend, liberty is not license. You have liberty to swing your fist, but where my nose begins is where your liberty ends. We need to change many of our concepts today.

The self-centered man will not find satisfaction in this life. To be alone in your work may satisfy for a while, but finally you get tired of it. I don't like to travel alone. I go to many conferences in my work, and I take my wife with me everywhere I go. Most of us find that we don't like to go alone.

Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished [Eccl. 4:13].

Solomon was both -- a wise child and a very foolish king.

For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor [Eccl. 4:14].

We should be interested in what happens in federal and state governments because it is going to affect our living. A great many people become poor because the politicians become rich and influential. Certainly folk have a right to protest against that. The corruption that has arisen in our country is wrecking business, making many people poor, and retired folk suffer from it.

I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead.

There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit [[Eccl. 4:15-16](#)].

"The second child that shall stand up in his stead." It is interesting to notice that Solomon was a second child. He was a second child of Bathsheba. He was not the child whom David would have chosen to be the next king. Solomon apparently had noted that since Isaac was not the first child and Jacob was not the first child, God has a way of choosing seconds. If you feel that you are second-class today, remember that you are first-class with God.

The second thing to notice is that later on things seem different from what they were at the time. "They also that come after shall not rejoice in him." Someone, such as a president, may be very popular during his day. Then, as time begins to recede from him, when the glamor boys and publicity men are no longer heard, and the news media are no longer building him up, we can see that his time in office was not a blessing to the nation but actually a time of deterioration. "There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him."

Chapter 5

Now Solomon tries something else, and this is something that may interest you a great deal. He tries to find satisfaction in religion, and he does not find it. I am going to say several things which may be startling to you, but don't reject them until you think about them just a little.

Did you know that religion has damned more people in this world than anything else has? Take a look at what the pagan religions have done for people in the past and in the present. Look at the condition of India. These people do not have a lower mentality than other peoples of the world. It is their religion that keeps them down. Consider China. As I write, China is in the grip of a terrible dictatorship, but it has made China a nation to be reckoned with. Their pagan religions did not do even that much for them. The Moslem world is fractured and is in sad condition. South America is as rich in natural resources as North America; yet most of the people remain in a miserable condition, and its religion tries to keep it that way. Look at what liberal protestantism and liberal Romanism have done to this country. When this country began to give up its belief in God and its respect for the Bible, when liberalism came into the pulpits of our nation, then deterioration began in our land.

My friend, if you have a religion, I suggest you get rid of it and exchange it for Christ. I personally do not think one can call Christianity a religion. There is no ritual whatsoever given with Christianity. Have you ever stopped to think of that? This is the reason we can have all kinds of churches with different forms of worship -- for instance you can sing the Doxology if you want to, but you don't have to. Christianity was never given a form to follow. Why? Because Christianity is a Person. To be a Christian means that you trust Christ. Religion has never been very helpful to man.

Seeking Satisfaction In Religion (5:1-8)

Listen to what Solomon is saying now -- this is terrific!

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil [Eccl. 5:1].

Going to some churches is not only a waste of time; it is wrong. It is wrong to give your approval to a liberal pulpit. It is wrong when you do not give your support to a fundamental pastor who is giving out the Word of God. Solomon tried being religious. He went up to the temple, but he warns, "Have as little to do with it as possible; keep your mouth shut. Go and sit, but for goodness' sake don't commit yourself to anything."

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few [Eccl. 5:2].

He is warning, "Do not make any decision under the stress of emotion." Cry at the movies, but don't do it in church. Don't sign a pledge. If you are going to rent an apartment or a house, it's all right to sign for that, but don't commit yourself to God in writing. In other words, make it a religion; go through the form but avoid reality.

My friend, Solomon is not the only one who tried that. There are a lot of unhappy people in our churches today. They never get involved; they just go through a nice sweet little ritual. There is nothing as deadening as that!

For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words [Eccl. 5:3].

There are a lot of things being said in church that should not be said.

When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou has vowed [Eccl. 5:4].

Don't go forward at an invitation unless you are really doing business with God. I recall conducting a service after which I was severely criticized because I would not let young people come forward. It was obvious to me that it would have been merely a display. I felt it was better to let them make a decision for Christ right where they were sitting. Oh, how many folk have come forward in a meeting when it has meant nothing to them at all! "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it." Don't break your vow -- not to God. You can't promise God things, fail to make good on them, and then expect to maintain a vital relationship with Him.

There is a lot of pious talking and pious promising that is absolutely meaningless because it is never carried out.

Do you know that God actually gave a law concerning vows? Read [Leviticus 27](#). I deal with this chapter in the second volume of my book, Learning Through Leviticus. My friend, when you make a vow to God, you had better mean what you say, because God is going to hold you to it. There is many a person who is no longer a missionary, many a preacher who is out of the pulpit, many a Christian who has been put on the shelf because

they promised God that which they didn't mean at all. It is not a religious ceremony when you are dealing with God. You are dealing with a Person who hears you and expects you to keep your promise.

Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? [Eccl. 5:5-6].

After making a vow to God, we are not to say, "It was an error -- I should never have said it; I didn't really mean it." We are dealing with a living God. It seems there are many people who don't know that. As a result, they stand way out on the fringe of the things of God. God is a reality, and we need to be very careful in our dealings with Him.

For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God [Eccl. 5:7].

In "dreams and many words there are also divers vanities" -- that is, all kinds of emptiness. They are no substitute for a personal relationship with God. So many people say, "I have had a dream" or "I have had an experience." And they are putting their trust in that. There are many people today who use an experience to test the Word of God. It must be the other way around: All experience must be tested by the Word of God. We are instructed to try the spirits to see whether they are of God or not (see [1 John 4:1](#)). Too many people go out on a tangent of experience and live by that. That is merely religion. That is an appeal to the emotion, an appeal to the aesthetic sense.

My friend, does your faith in Christ rest upon experience, or does it rest upon the naked Word of God? Do you have religion, or do you have Christ?

If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they [Eccl. 5:8].

In our country we have heard much about corruption in the poverty program. There are so many today who are attempting to get rich at the expense of the poor. God will judge that. "For he that is higher than the highest regardeth." God sees what is going on. I think that any Christian who is in a program in which he sees corruption should get out of the program. If you see corruption in a program, believe me, God sees the corruption in the program, and God will deal with it in judgment.

The history of this world bears that out. God watches what governments do to the poor. Governments that have exploited the poor have fallen. An example is the French Revolution. It wasn't a nice, pretty thing by any means. It was an awful thing. I think it was the judgment of God upon the corruption of a nation in which a few were living at the expense of the many poor.

God has much to say about the relief of the poor. When the Lord Jesus comes to reign during the kingdom age which we call the Millennium, then they will find that there is

One reigning who really means business when He says that He is going to do something for the poor. There will be justice and righteousness for them. I don't think that He will put them on any kind of dole system. But each person will make his contribution and will receive justice at His hands.

This brings us to a new section in Solomon's experiments to find satisfaction in life. As we have seen, he tried science, the study of natural laws. He tried wisdom and philosophy, pleasure, and materialism. He tried living for the "now." He tried fatalism. He tried egoism, living for self. Then, of all things, he tried religion.

Now we will see Solomon engage in another experiment. Solomon was in a position to pursue and enjoy wealth better than anyone else. He was probably the richest man who has ever been on this earth. He gave himself over to the accumulation of gold, and he could buy anything that he wanted. The riches of Solomon was the factor that finally brought the downfall of the nation. The greed of the surrounding nations was aroused. They wanted to move in to get some of that wealth. God had put up a wall of protection around Israel, but that wall crumbled, and God allowed the nations to come into Israel and help themselves.

Seeking Satisfaction In Pursuit And Enjoyment Of Wealth (5:10-14)

He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity [Eccl. 5:10].

The president of a great corporation comes to the end of the year and sees a tremendous profit, but that actually does not satisfy him. A man may have a big bank account, which offers him some measure of security, but it will not really satisfy him. Wealth will not bring satisfaction in life.

Wealth is not wrong in itself. The Scripture never condemns wealth. It condemns the love of money. Not the money itself, but the love of money is a root of all evil (see [1Tim. 6:10](#)). To accumulate wealth for wealth's sake is wrong. The miser thinks dollars are flat so they can be stacked; the spendthrift thinks they are round so they can be rolled. Both are entirely wrong.

Man's attitude toward money is the issue. There is nothing wrong with our profit system itself. The wrong is in the people who are in it. It is the love of money which is wrong. The love of money makes people try to get rich for riches' sake.

We see men who are held together, bound together in an arrangement just to make money for money's sake. I was interested in hearing a comedian tell about a play he had a part in producing. He was thanking all those who had participated and was telling how they had all cooperated. It was a very lovely speech with no trace of humor in it. When he got to the end, he said, "And we have all been held together in this endeavor by one thing" -- he paused a moment -- "greed!" Yes, greed was the ingredient that held them together to make the production. That is the ingredient that holds big business together. It holds the Mafia together. It holds a great many organizations together.

I must confess that I believe it is wrong for one man or one organization to accumulate so much money when others are in poverty and need. This may sound radical, but I do believe that eventually something must be done about that. Look at India for an example. The maharaja has become immensely wealthy while the masses are poverty-stricken. God condemns that kind of thing. He condemns it because of the love of money and the use which is made of it. In our own country greed is the thing that is wrong with godless capitalism and godless labor. Greed -- the love of money. It would be so wonderful if man would make money for the glory of God. It would be wonderful if man labored for money for the glory of God. It would be so wonderful if money were put to its proper use. The only cure for greed, of course, is to have Christ in the heart!

When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? [Eccl. 5:11].

Growth just for the sake of growth is no good at all. This is true of a business or even of a Christian organization or church. I have learned it by personal experience.

For years I was the pastor of a large church. Just to grow for the sake of growing so one can have a big church is nothing in the world but a big headache. There is no fun in it. There is no joy in it. The Lord taught me that to grow for the glory of God is to be my one purpose in life. I keep this goal before me: Vernon McGee, you do this one thing, get out the Word of God.

The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep [Eccl. 5:12].

The laboring man may not have too much to eat. That keeps him from being a glutton, and he probably sleeps a lot better by not overeating. The rich man has an abundance. In fact, he has gourmet food all the time, and he gets pretty tired of it. He loses his appetite for it. Besides that, he has to worry about his riches, which keeps him awake at night. When we were in Hawaii with one of our tours, we were permitted to stay in a lovely hotel because of the size of our tour. I noticed how unhappy the people in the hotel seemed to be. They were people who had come to Hawaii to have a good time, but they were always worrying about their things. One woman spent thirty minutes getting her jewels in a safe-deposit box. When I got to the desk, the girl said, "She's been here before and she'll be back a dozen times to check on them or take out a piece to wear and bring it back again." You know, I was glad my wife didn't have that kind of problem. That rich woman had a real problem -- probably one hundred thousand dollars worth of jewels to worry about. Riches multiply anxieties. Maybe that is one reason the Lord didn't let me become rich!

There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt [Eccl. 5:13].

Riches actually hurt rather than help a great many people. Sometimes the poor man is happier than the rich man. However, the apostle Paul said that he knew both how to abound and how to be abased (see [Phil. 4:12](#)). Frankly, I'd like to try both.

But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand [Eccl. 5:14].

He is saying that a man can accumulate a fortune and leave it to a son, and the boy will run through it -- he will spend it all. Today men have become pretty wise about that. A man doesn't leave the money to his son directly, but in a trusteeship so that someone else doles out the money to the boy in small amounts to preserve the family fortune.

There are a lot of prominent men today who never made a dime in their lives. The reason they are rich is because they inherited it. They lack discernment in the use of the money; yet they are in positions of influence. This is one of our problems today.

I think that eventually there will be a division in our nation which will not be between races, but will narrow down to the rich and the poor. That has always been the line of demarcation. I believe many rich people sense this, which explains why so many of the wealthy are politically liberal in their thinking. They already have their money, and no one can touch it; so they are willing to bring in liberal programs which will be supported by the taxes that you and I pay. The wealthy do not pay for those programs. That is a real problem. Solomon understood and spoke into that kind of situation. Solomon learned that wealth does not satisfy, nor is it the solution to the problems of life.

Chapter 6

This chapter concludes Solomon's pursuit and enjoyment of wealth in his search for satisfaction.

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:

A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease [Eccl. 6:1-2].

A friend told me that when he was in a hotel in Florida, he saw John D. Rockefeller, Sr., sitting and eating his meal. He had just a few little crumbs, some health food, that had been set before him. Over at a side table my friend saw one of the men who worked as a waiter in the hotel sitting with a big juicy steak in front of him. The man who could afford the steak couldn't eat one; the man who could not afford the steak had one to eat because he worked for the hotel. It is better to have a good appetite than a big bank account!

If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he [Eccl. 6:3].

The rich man can eat only three meals a day, he can sleep on only one bed at a time, and he cannot live longer than the poor man -- no matter how many doctors he may have -- and he takes nothing with him when he leaves. There is no pocket in a shroud. Job was a rich man, and he said that he had come here with nothing and he was going out the same

way. It is rather empty to give one's life to the pursuit of that which does not bring happiness here and has no value hereafter. Some people spend their lives in this kind of an emptiness.

Chapter 7

This is the last experiment that Solomon tries. He has made experiments in everything under the sun to see if any of it would bring satisfaction and enjoyment to him. He tried science, the study of the natural laws of the universe, which made some contribution but did not satisfy him. Then he went into the study of philosophy and psychology. They didn't satisfy. He went the limit on pleasure and materialism. He tried fatalism, which is such a popular philosophy of life today. He tried egoism, living for self. Then he tried religion -- no religion can satisfy because only Christ can satisfy the heart. Wealth was another thing which Solomon tried. He was the wealthiest man in the world, but he found that wealth did not bring satisfaction in and of itself.

Now we will see him try the last experiment: morality. Today we would call him a "do-gooder." I would say that this is the place to which the majority of the people in America are moving. (I think the majority would still be classified as do-gooders.) They are going down the middle of the road on the freeway of life. This group can be described as the Babbitts, doing business in the Big City, under a neon sign, living out in suburbia, in a sedate, secluded, exclusive neighborhood, and taking it easy. Their children go to the best schools. They move with the best crowds. They go to the best church, the richest church in the neighborhood, the one with the tallest steeple, the loudest chimes, and the most educated preacher, who knows everything that man can possibly know, except the Bible (of course, if he did know and preach the Bible, he would lose his job). This is the kind of do-good society Solomon now tries.

Seeking Satisfaction In Morality - The Good Life (7:1-21)

A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth [Eccl. 7:1].

That is true, by the way. There is nothing wrong with that statement. A good name is better than precious ointment. It is gratifying to a man to have people say he is a wonderful neighbor and that they have never had an argument with him, that he won't discuss religion or politics, or won't get involved in any kind of bad situation. He just smiles and goes right down the middle of the road, never veering to the right or to the left. He is a respectable person, recognized in the community. He joins different organizations of the town and does business with all kinds of people. Some day at his funeral the preacher will say all kinds of good things about him to try to push him into heaven. Solomon says a good reputation and a long eulogy at your funeral are what we should strive for down here. But will that satisfy the heart?

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart [Eccl. 7:2].

All of this life of morality and do-goodism is done in a dignified manner. People go to a club meeting and listen to a man come and talk about pollution. They don't do anything

about it, but they sit and talk about it in a very dignified way. The next week someone talks to them on civic problems. They sit and listen to that, and again nothing will be done. Then they all go to the funeral of one of the men in their fraternal lodge and hear nice things said about him. Nobody is particularly moved; no one will miss him too much. This is just how life is in our hometown.

That kind of life cannot satisfy the needs of man. To me, that life would be blah. I am glad I have never lived like that, and I don't live like that today. It is not really living. I think this is the worst situation of them all. Frankly, I cannot blame a lot of young people who are rebelling against that kind of society.

Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better [Eccl. 7:3].

People today do anything to avoid sorrow. We have it arranged now so that you can laugh all the way to the cemetery. Reality is so covered over with flowers and soft music and a preacher saying a lot of easy things, nice things, that everyone goes home and says, "My, that was a nice funeral" -- and forgets the grim reality of death as soon as possible.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth [Eccl. 7:4].

They don't get more than fifty yards from the cemetery until someone tells a joke and they all have a good laugh. This is living in the presence of death. Somehow it doesn't occur to these folk, as they see their friends slipping out of this life, that they, too, are moving along to death. Doesn't it occur to them that it might be well for them to check to see where they are going? Are they saved? Are they lost? Are they rightly related to God? They don't consider that important. They give to the Community Chest and are active in Red Cross. They are involved citizens in the community. They wouldn't dare confess Christ and take a public stand for Him.

It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.

For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity [Eccl. 7:5-6].

Solomon's point is this: Why not try both groups? Listen to the rebuke of a wise person, then go down and listen to a rock band and enjoy that also. One may be better than the other, but it is easier to go with both groups. This is the picture through the remainder of this chapter.

Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools [Eccl. 7:9].

Don't get angry at anything. Be a nice fellow, stay friends with everyone because that will help business. Go the easy way, walk softly. Don't be an extremist, be willing to compromise. Go with one crowd to be popular with them, and the next night go with a different crowd to be popular with them. You see, the do-gooder in this chapter is the man who lives like hell on Saturday night and then goes to church and passes for a Christian on Sunday. A man who had been stone drunk on Saturday night saw me on

Sunday morning and said, "I want you to know that I am a Christian. What do you think I am, a pagan?" And that's what he was, a pagan.

Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun [Eccl. 7:11].

In the Book of Proverbs we see that "wisdom" is another name for Christ. Christ has been made unto us wisdom. Oh, how this do-gooder needs to have Christ!

For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it [Eccl. 7:12].

"Money is a defence" -- this man wants plenty of money, but he doesn't want Christ.

"Wisdom giveth life to them that have it." And you can't buy life with money. Medical science may be able to extend your life for a few years, but it doesn't give eternal life here and out yonder in eternity. Only wisdom, which is Christ, can do that.

Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee [Eccl. 7:21].

Don't be disturbed by reports that somebody who knows you well says you are a crook. If you take the middle of the road, in the long run the community will applaud you.

My friend, seeking satisfaction in life by just trying to be a do-gooder is living like a vegetable, not a man! Yet this is the life-style of the majority in modern America. They will go to the burlesque show on Saturday night and to church on Sunday morning! What hypocrisy! We have seen our youth rebelling against this type of living. There are two thousand of them over on the island of Hawaii. I had the privilege of ministering to some of them, and quite a few turned to Christ. They have tried everything else. But why didn't they find Christ in their homes in which their parents were church members? They saw that there was something radically missing in their homes and in their churches. They have seen the hypocrisy, the emptiness of the life of the moralist, the do-gooder.

I believe it is easier to reach a godless atheist than a hypocritical churchgoer. The godless atheist may respond when he hears the gospel for the first time, but the hypocritical churchgoer has heard the gospel again and again and has become hardened to it. That is the real tragedy.

Chapter 8

This chapter continues with the man who is lukewarm. He blows neither hot nor cold. The moralists and the do-gooders say that they are living by the Golden Rule, but they don't seem to have any idea of what the Golden Rule is and what it requires. Solomon observes that there doesn't seem to be much difference between the wicked and the righteous.

Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed [Eccl. 8:1].

Only Christ who is real wisdom can change a man's life. He can come into a life and bring excitement, joy, and peace. He can give us all the things that are needed today to deliver us from living a mediocre existence.

I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God.

Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him [[Eccl. 8:2-3](#)].

He is saying, "Be careful what you do. Don't get into trouble."

Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou? [[Eccl. 8:4](#)].

Now the king can take a stand for what he believes because he has the liberty to do so. My friend, why don't you live like a king and take a stand for Christ?

I talked to a young vagrant who had adopted what was then called the hippie life-style. I asked him, "Why in the world do you take up this life-style? Why are you dressed like you are?" He said, "Man, I want liberty; I want freedom. I want to live as I please." I said, "Let me ask you this one question: If you changed your garb and went back to your crowd, would they accept you?" He thought a moment and then said, "I guess they wouldn't." So I asked, "Then you don't have much liberty, do you?"

Young people feel that they must have the approval of the crowd, of the pack, so they really don't know what liberty is. A great many of them take drugs for no other reason than to be accepted by the crowd. I asked the young man, "Do you think that I don't have freedom because I dress as I dress?" He answered, "Yes, I would say that." Then I told him that I have a freedom which he didn't have. I told him that I don't dress like this all the time. I can dress any way that I please -- and I do. I don't conform to a pattern. I have liberty. I said, "You and I are living in a world where there is rebellion against God -- that is the direction mankind is moving. But I can bow my knee to the Lord Jesus Christ. I can call Him my Lord and my Savior. That is real freedom. I am not going in the direction of the crowd. I have made my choice. Young man, if you want real freedom, come to Christ. Jesus said, 'If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed' " ([John 8:36](#)). That is freedom.

It is hard for people to understand that the do-gooder is just as much in rebellion against God as the criminal in the jail and that he is bound as securely by the rules of his group and the patterns they set. He is bound to a life-style that goes down the middle of the road.

There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it [[Eccl. 8:8](#)].

If he continues taking that cocktail to conform to the group he associates with, one of these days he is going to be an alcoholic. (Oh, there are millions of them in our country,

and they are all do-gooders!) And finally death will come to him -- "neither hath he power in the day of death."

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil [Eccl. 8:11].

What a picture of that which is happening in our contemporary society! When judgment is not executed, men do more and more evil work, because evil is in the hearts of men. Even men who call themselves Christian continue in sin, saying, "Look, I've been in sin for five years, and God has done nothing about it" Well, that already reveals His judgment upon you. He has done nothing about it because He is way down the road waiting for you. In fact, He can wait until eternity -- you can't. ". . . Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" ([2Cor. 6:2](#)). God grants you today so that you can turn to Him.

There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity [Eccl. 8:14].

Solomon observes that when you look at the surface of things, there does not seem to be too much difference between the wicked and the righteous. It seems that it really doesn't make any difference whether one is wicked or righteous because both come to the same end.

Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun [Eccl. 8:15].

"Eat, . . . drink, and . . . be merry" -- he concludes that the best thing to do is to enjoy life and to enjoy the labor "which God giveth him under the sun." That is the most empty philosophy of life that anyone can have.

Chapter 9

We have labeled the moralist as the do-gooder. This is where we see him in action. We have seen that this is the man who says, "I believe that if you pay your honest debts and live a good life, God will accept you." He is like the average American who travels down the middle of the road on the freeway of life. He is Babbitt on Main Street in Big City, doing business under a neon sign but living in the sedate, secluded, and exclusive neighborhood in the suburbs. He is the one who feels that he is going to heaven on his own propulsion. "I am working out my own salvation, and I'm really a pretty good fellow after all." He has a hard philosophy of life and very little real joy. Oh, he has his "happy hour" each evening when he has his cocktail, but he comes to some very doleful and pessimistic conclusions.

We have seen that many of the teachings of the Book of Ecclesiastes are quite radical. They present the philosophy of man under the sun. They do not present the Christian

viewpoint, nor do they represent God's viewpoint. They tell us the inevitable conclusions that are reached by the man under the sun. I find it a doleful book, and I find this chapter especially so. This book of the Bible is like a black sheep in a flock of sheep. One can take many passages out of this book which seem to contradict the other portions of Scripture. They express ideas that are contrary to some of the great teachings of Scripture, which explains why this book has been a favorite among atheists. Volney and Voltaire quoted from it frequently. It fosters a pessimistic philosophy of life like Schopenhauer had. Some of the modern cults predicate the main thesis of their systems on this book.

How did this book get into the canon of Scripture? Well, it is obvious that one must go back to the purpose of the author. What is his thesis? What is he demonstrating? Is he trying to set forth Christian principles? We must always remember that Solomon is speaking of life apart from God. He has tried to make an experiment to see how to be happy without God. These are the conclusions that he has come to "under the sun." This is the way the man of the world looks at life. So then it is no surprise that unbelievers would quote from this book.

Let me give you an illustration to help you understand this book. Halfway between high tide and low tide is what they call the mean tide, which is sea level. There is a realm of life below sea level; there is a realm of life above sea level. Actually, they are like two different worlds. In the world below sea level there are certain chemical elements in a world that is aqueous. Above the sea level there are different combinations of chemical elements in a world that is gaseous. Below sea level are the fish with fins. Above are the birds with wings. There are two ways of life. The mockingbird does not tell the tuna fish that he is all wrong because he doesn't have feathers. The monkey and the barracuda could actually have a big debate on which direction is sea level. The monkey would say that sea level is down; the barracuda would argue that sea level is up.

Now Ecclesiastes is "under the sun." The Christian life is in the heavenly places where God is. Man under the sun will have a different view of life from the view of God who is above the sun. We are looking at two different worlds, two different ways of life. Life under the sun is a mundane existence apart from God. It views a future and an eternity without God. The Christian life is a contrast to this in every way because man has been saved by the grace of God and is a display of His grace.

So there are two different spheres, and the laws and principles of one will not apply to the other. They are as far apart as that which is below sea level and that which is above sea level. Because this is true, it is a waste of time to tell the non-Christian, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" ([Col. 3:1](#)). That man is not even in Christ; he is not risen with Christ. Therefore he cannot seek those things which are above. He first needs to be born again, to become a new creature. You see, it is no use talking to a non-Christian as if he were a man in Christ, because he isn't. It would be like trying to teach a mud turtle to fly. The mud turtle likes the mud; he is not even interested in flying.

As we have seen, Ecclesiastes is the record of experiments that Solomon made with life. He tried everything "under the sun" to see if he could find satisfaction for his soul. Everything must be interpreted in that light.

Solomon tried the pursuit of knowledge and came to the conclusion, ". . . of making many books there is no end" ([Eccl. 12:12](#)). He tried pleasure and the outcome was, "I hated life." He tried riches and came to the conclusion, "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver" ([Eccl. 5:10](#)). Then he tried religion and concluded that it will make one become a lunatic or a racketeer, a crank or a crook, a nut or a bum. Then he tried fame and a good name; he tried morality. All he could say was that it was all vanity and vexation of spirit.

Thackery wrote a wonderful novel called *Vanity Fair*. It is the story of a girl named Becky, and it is set in the time of the wars of Napoleon. It tells of the littleness and of the sin in the lives of the characters as they lived their lives apart from God (Thackeray was a Christian). He concluded the book by saying, "The play is over. We put the puppets back in the box. All is vanity and vexation of spirit."

By the way, you could do the same thing with the entertainment and pleasure capitals of our country. They are places of fame and riches and also places that have a monopoly on sleeping pills and narcotics. Life is empty without God and without Christ.

Augustine gave us that often-quoted expression, "Thou has made us for Thyself, and the heart of man is restless until it finds its rest in Thee" (Confessions, Bk. 1, Sec. 1). The human heart is so constructed that you could put the whole world in it and still it would not be filled.

Quotations from Ecclesiastes have been used to support socialism. There is only one answer for statism or regimentation. Christ is the answer, the only answer. All other routes lead to emptiness and frustration. With Him there is life abundant.

For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them [[Eccl. 9:1](#)].

He is not worried about the future. Eternity is a realm he doesn't even think about because he knows nothing about it.

All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath [[Eccl. 9:2](#)].

It looks to him as if it doesn't make any difference which direction you go. They all come out the same way anyhow. Remember, this is not God's answer. This is the way it looks to man under the sun as he observes the lives of people around him.

This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men

is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead [Eccl. 9:3].

Why should anyone work at all? Life is just a big lottery, and you are the victim of your circumstances. The fellow who was lucky enough to get his share of it, ought to share it with you. The philosophies of our day are not saying anything new. Karl Marx didn't say anything new -- Solomon was way ahead of him.

For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion [Eccl. 9:4].

If you follow along this basic premise, it is eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you die. Then, whether you are a fool or a wise man doesn't make much difference. It's still better to be alive than dead, even if you are a fool while you are alive -- "for a living dog is better than a dead lion."

For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten [Eccl. 8:5].

This is where the idea of a "soul sleep" arises (see also v. 10). All of this is the observation of the man under the sun. This is the way it looks if death is the end and there is nothing after death. That is why he says it would be better to be a living dog than a dead lion.

God has told us what happens after death. The body is put into the grave, and it is the body that sleeps in the grave. Scripture makes it very clear that the soul of the child of God goes to be with the Lord: "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2Cor. 5:6-8). The soul, the real person, goes to be with the Lord - - absent from the body, present with the Lord. The bodies you and I are living in are only our earthly tabernacles or tents, and we'll move out of them someday. So you see, soul sleep is not even a Christian viewpoint.

Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun [Eccl. 9:6].

I told you that this is a doleful chapter. It looks as if life is futile, purposeless and without meaning. If death is the end of everything, then man is just like an animal. The evolutionist says that man once was an animal, and this man under the sun says man is like an animal now. The end result of both is the same. Man dies like an animal.

How different it is for us who know that we have come from the creative hand of God and that we are going back to God.

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works [Eccl. 9:7].

The do-gooder who thinks that death is the end of it all finds his joy in the "happy hour." "Drink thy wine with a merry heart." This is about the most monotonous life in the world.

Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment [Eccl. 9:8].

He dresses up and keeps up a good front.

Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun [Eccl. 9:9].

Enjoy your marriage, he advises. There are many non-Christian couples who are enjoying their lives together -- I have met several of them. Oh, they have their problems and their dark days, but their attitude is, "Let's make the best of it."

Now here is another verse on which the theory of soul sleep is based.

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest [Eccl. 9:10].

It is certainly true that the body in the grave can no longer hold a hammer in its hand. The brain is no longer able to study or perform any mental chores. Solomon is speaking only of the body. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." He is talking about the hand, not the soul. It is the hand that will be put into the grave. If you are a child of God, you will go into the presence of the Lord. If you are not a child of God, you will go to the place of the dead until you are raised to be judged at the Great White Throne. This life does not end it all. This book does not teach soul sleep.

Now he will deal with social injustice and the minority groups.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all [Eccl. 9:11].

The observation of the man under the sun leads him to believe that life is a matter of time and chance. It is nothing but a big lottery. If you happen to be born black, you will have your problems. If you are born white, you will have your problems. If you are born yellow, you will have your problems. It's all chance, and there is nothing you can do about it. That is the thought here.

For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them [Eccl. 9:12].

If time and chance are the regulators of life, then you are just as helpless as the fish caught in a net. This is an awful viewpoint, the worst kind of fatalism. This is the philosophy of the men I mentioned who fly home at the end of the week, coming back to Southern California from Dallas, Kansas City, Chicago, and Seattle. They sit in the airplane and grit their teeth in the midst of the turbulence of a storm and say, "If the plane is going to go down, it will go down. If my number comes up, there is nothing I can do

about it." A man is just like a fish caught in a net. For the do-gooder, there is no other explanation. He is forced to come to this fatalistic philosophy.

Now Solomon gives a little parable:

There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it [Eccl. 9:14].

Come a little closer, Mr. Marxist, and listen to this parable. Do you want to lift up the burden of the downtrodden? Do you want to defend a minority group and the cause of the underdog? Is that the thing you're interested in? Well, may I say to you, there will arise a dictator. "A great king" will come against a people that let down their defenses and spend all their time with social problems which unsaved men cannot solve. (They've had probably six thousand years or longer, and they have not yet solved the problems of life. How much longer do you think God ought to give man to work these out?) "A great king" will take over such a city when socialistic methods are adopted.

Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man [Eccl. 9:15].

Who was that man who came and brought deliverance? His name was Wisdom, and Wisdom is another name for Christ. He came to this earth in poverty. Jesus could actually say, ". . . The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20). He was a poor man.

Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.

The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools [Eccl. 9:16-17].

Eventually the voice of the Lord Jesus will prevail. When He comes, His voice will be like the shout of the archangel and like the sound of a trumpet. There is a babble of voices in this world today, but there is coming a time when His voice will prevail in this world.

Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good [Eccl. 9:18].

Here is his conclusion of all he has said in this chapter. "Wisdom is better than weapons of war." And Christ is better than atomic energy.

"Wisdom is better than weapons of war." Years ago I crossed the ocean in the H.M.S. Queen Mary, and I shall never forget the morning when we came into Southampton. I got up early to watch it. It was a tremendous feat to bring that great ship into port. The pilot had brought her across the trackless ocean. How had he done it? He had done it by the principles that were set down by a little-known Greek philosopher years ago working in geometry. That's the way it was done. "Wisdom is better than weapons of war."

"But one sinner destroyeth much good." There is a tremendous influence exerted by the life of one individual. And the influence is more potent when it is in the wrong direction. History will bear this out.

Adam sinned and his sin has affected the entire race of mankind. Achan sinned, and because of him an entire nation went down in defeat. They had to deal with the sin of Achan before they could achieve a victory. Rehoboam's sin split the kingdom of Israel. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira brought the first defect into the early church, and from that day on the church has not been as potent as it was in the beginning.

You and I have an influence, either for good or for bad. No matter who you are, you occupy a place of influence. "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" ([Rom. 14:7](#)). Every person is a preacher. No one can keep himself from being a preacher.

I made that same statement to a man, an alcoholic, who lived with his mother in a house down the street from the church. His mother was brokenhearted over her boy, and she asked me to talk to him about Christ. One day I got him into my study. He had been drinking, but he was not what you would call drunk. I told him he was breaking his mother's heart, and I told him how low down and good for nothing his life was. He was not moved; he just sat there and took it. Then I asked him, "Do you know that you are a preacher?" At that he stood up and drew back his fist -- he was going to hit me. "You can't call me a preacher!" He would allow me to call him any kind of name but not a preacher! My friend, all of us are preachers. You are preaching to those around you by the life that you live.

I personally believe that the do-gooder, the man who boasts of his moral life apart from God is the greatest detriment. He actually stands in the way; he blocks the way to God because his message is, "Live like I do. I live without God. I just do good." There is nothing quite as deadening as that.

You are a preacher, whoever you are. It may be in a very small circle, but you are affecting someone. You are a preacher in your own home. This reminds me of a father who kept a jug of whiskey hidden in the corn crib. It was his habit to go out there every morning and get himself a drink. On a snowy morning he went out to the barn as was his habit, but this time he heard someone behind him. He turned around and found that it was his little son following him, stepping in the footsteps in the snow where his father had walked. The father asked, "What are you doing, son?" The boy answered, "I'm following in your footsteps." He sent the boy back into the house, and then he went out to the corn crib and smashed that jug of whiskey. He realized that he didn't want his boy to be following in his footsteps. Someone in your home is following in your footsteps. Where are you leading him?

You may be influencing a wide circle of human society. You may have influence in your neighborhood and in your community. You have influence in your Sunday School. Somebody is looking at you and watching to see whether or not you mean business with God. Does your going to church mean anything more to you than going to a drive-in to pick up a hamburger? Does your life suggest that there is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun? You have influence.

You remember that Peter preached a mighty sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Andrew just sat on the sidelines and could say, "That is my brother. I brought him to Christ." That was Andrew's influence. You, today, are pointing men to heaven or to hell. Now, if you want to go to hell, that's your business, but you have no right to lead a little boy there. You have no right to lead your family and those who surround you there. Even if you want to go, it's awful to lead others. Influence -- "One sinner destroyeth much good." Think about it.

Chapter 10

We see here that the injustice of life suggests the adoption of a moderate course.

Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour [Eccl. 10:1].

Life is full of illustrations of this truth. One night on the town can mean a lifetime in the darkness of disease or even death. An officer in a church I served years ago told me, "I was brought up in a Christian home, and I really never did run around, but when I went away from home and got a job, I went out with the fellows one night. That is the only night in my life that I went out, and that is the night I got a venereal disease. I had to postpone marriage for several years, and I had to break off an engagement with a sweet, lovely girl." Just one dead fly will ruin the ointment of the apothecary. How tragic!

A mother spends twenty-one years teaching a son to be wise, and some girl will come along and make a fool out of him in five minutes. What a picture! A little folly, a little foolishness -- that is all it takes. It can be the thing that can ruin a life and spoil the lives of others.

A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left [Eccl. 10:2].

The right hand is the hand of strength. A wise man's heart is at his right hand. Whatever he does, he does it with all his heart. He doesn't do it reluctantly. The fool's heart is at his left hand. He just does things in a halfhearted way.

My friend, whatever you do, do it with heart. If you are going to serve God, do it with joy and excitement. Don't make the Christian life a drudge. Make it something worthwhile. Whatever you do, do it with excitement.

Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool [Eccl. 10:3].

A fool does not have to carry a placard on himself that says, "I am a fool." The fact of the matter is that all he has to do is open his mouth. Sometimes he doesn't even have to open his mouth to prove that he is a fool.

Sometimes at community meetings people will get up to express a viewpoint. A man will make a thoughtful suggestion, and I will think, My, I didn't know my neighbor was so intelligent. Then a fellow gets up to speak, and the minute he opens his mouth, I look at

my friend sitting next to me and arch my eyebrows. The Bible calls him a fool, and he tells everyone what he is.

If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences [[Eccl. 10:4](#)].

The man under the sun is going to take the position of yielding in order to pacify. In other words, "If you can't fight city hall, join them."

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler:

Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place [[Eccl. 10:5-6](#)].

This is one of the things that has happened in our day and age: a dignity has been given to sin. There was a time when sin was down on the sidestreet. It was considered dirty and filthy, and it savored of that which was low and foul. But today sin has moved up on the boulevard. Sin is committed with great dignity, and it has been given a prominent place. It is given a prominent place on TV shows.

I noticed the other day that they interviewed a stripper on a TV show, that is, a girl who takes off her clothes in a nightclub. When I was a young fellow in my teens, living a life away from God, we would sneak off on Saturday night to go to such shows. It was dirty; it was filthy. Today they call it an art form! Today sin is handled in such a dignified way. "Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place."

Have you heard interviews with the ordinary citizen or with the ordinary Christian? These are the people who are making the finest contribution to their community and to their society. Are they the ones who are interviewed? No, they occupy a low place. You never hear of them. The attention is focused on the ones who are the sinners and oddballs.

I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth [[Eccl. 10:7](#)].

To work hard, save your money, and study late do not always mean that you will become a success. The fool next door may inherit a million dollars. Sometimes it is the fool who rides the horse, while the prince walks as the servant.

I know many wonderful Christians -- across this land I have had the privilege of meeting some of the most wonderful people who are humble folk. Many of them live in humble homes; some of them are financially well-to-do. But they are ignored. They are "princes walking as servants upon the earth" today. What a picture!

He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him [[Eccl. 10:8](#)].

If you think that you can get by with sin, especially if you are a child of God, you are very foolish. God may not act immediately, but all you need to do is wait; God will eventually judge you for it. I have watched that over the years. Christians do things that are wrong and seem to get by with it, but somewhere down the line God begins to move in on them, and He takes them to His woodshed.

Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby [Eccl. 10:9].

Removing stones in that day was removing the markers of property lines. This is saying again that one cannot get by with sin. Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. If you try to cheat someone out of his property, or anything else, God will see to it that you will get hurt. This is the reason the Lord tells us that we are not to avenge ourselves. The Lord says, ". . . Vengeance is mine; I will repay . . ." ([Rom. 12:19](#)). The Lord is the One who will settle the accounts.

If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct [Eccl. 10:10].

If the hoe gets dull, you will sharpen it, if you have any sense at all. A dull hoe makes digging that much harder. Unfortunately, many people are not willing to do the thing that will sharpen the hoe.

A young man told me the other day that God had called him to preach, and he wanted to take a short course to prepare himself. I said, "Young man, don't do that. Sharpen your hoe. Sharpen your sword. Don't go out untrained. Take the time for sharpening." It is foolish to take out a dull hoe and expect to cut down many weeds. Sharpen the hoe and then move in on the weed patch. The Book of Ecclesiastes has some great lessons for us to learn. It is an unusual book.

Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better [Eccl. 10:11].

We need to understand the practices of the East if we are going to understand this verse. It is very similar to [Psalm 58:4-5](#): "Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely." The same idea is found in Jeremiah. "For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the LORD" ([Jer. 8:17](#)).

The adder is a very deadly reptile. We have all seen pictures of the Indian fakirs (and I believe it would be just as correct to spell it fakers) who play a doleful sort of tune on a horn to charm the cobra. The cobra does a sort of dance; I suppose one could call it the cobra hula dance. The cobra will not strike as long as the tune is being played on that horn. Now I don't know about you, but if I had one of those horns, and a cobra came along, I'd be a long-winded person -- I'd play as long as I possibly could. But there will come a time when the cobra or the adder will not listen, and finally he will strike. When he does strike, it means death.

The "serpent" in the passages we have quoted probably is not referring to literal snakes. I think it is referring to that person, "babbler," who will deceive you, who will betray you, a Judas Iscariot. After all, that's what Antichrist will be to the nation of Israel in the great Tribulation Period.

Even among people in the church you will find those who will say things that are not true. "Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better." He may pose as your friend, but he is going to bite you like a serpent no matter how nice you are to him.

This was the kind of sorrow that David felt when his friend Ahithophel turned against him. Ahithophel had been his counselor and his personal friend, but he left David and went with Absalom when Absalom rebelled. That broke David's heart. I think David was a broken man after the rebellion of Absalom. Up to that time, I doubt that there had ever been a ruler like King David in his prime. After that time of rebellion David became an old man. He pours out his heart in [Psalm 55](#), and this is the picture we get.

Solomon is saying that in view of the possibility of this happening, one should be very careful. I would say that that is the philosophy of life of the average person today. He is the do-gooder who walks in the middle of the road. He has been told to be careful with So-and-So, who can repeat what he says and twist it. So when Mr. Do-gooder faces these people he adopts a very sweet attitude toward them, but he is very careful about what he says.

Sometimes it seems that we actually should confront the kind of person who takes facts and twists them and point out to that person exactly what he or she is doing. However, I know from experience that if you point this out, you will be attacked in a most vicious manner.

[The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself \[Eccl. 10:12\].](#)

"The lips of the fool will swallow up himself" and those who are around him as well. That is why one should be careful in making friends and choosing the right kind of friends. When I taught school, I always advised the freshman class, "You are going to make friends here that will be friends with you for life. You may even meet your mate here (and of course some of them did), so be careful about the friends you make."

When my daughter went away to college, I gave her that same advice. I told her she would have the greatest opportunity of all her life to make some wonderful friendships. But I advised her to be careful in choosing her friends. There are some people who will try to destroy you.

There are people who are like the adder or the serpent. If you are nice to them and can keep them charmed, things will go well, but be very careful how you act in their presence. This is good advice, my friend, but it is a middle-of-the-road course, as you can see.

[The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.](#)

[A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? \[Eccl. 10:13-14\].](#)

How true this is. Have you ever noticed that if you have a group and you throw out a topic for an open discussion, there will generally be some loquacious person in that

group. (I believe that now they call such sessions "rap" sessions. When I was young, we called them "bull" sessions.) Usually some person who likes to talk will take over the discussion, and often he will say foolish, absurd things. The group begins to wish that person would keep his mouth shut.

This is one reason why I am not very fond of open discussions. When I have a question and answer period, I always encourage people to write out their questions. If you don't do that, you will almost invariably find one babbler in the group, one talker who comes under this category of being a troublemaker. Someone has described such a person as one whose brain starts his mouth working, and then the brain goes off and leaves it.

The labour of the foolish wearieh every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city [Eccl. 10:15].

Today we would say the fool doesn't know enough to come in out of the rain.

Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning! [Eccl. 10:16].

They give themselves over to pleasure instead of ruling the people properly and being a blessing to the land.

Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness! [Eccl. 10:17].

The big problem in our country is not drugs but liquor. The number of alcoholics in this country is now in the millions. Probably we cannot get an accurate figure on the number of alcoholics because of the liquor interests, but it is a real cause for alarm. There are too many cocktail parties in Washington where the political decisions are being made.

"Blessed art thou, O land, when . . . thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!"

By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through [Eccl. 10:18].

This is an indictment of laziness, of the refusal to work. I'm afraid that is becoming a way of life in our country today. A common greeting is, "Take it easy" and "Have a good day." In other words, do as little as possible and have as much fun as you can.

A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things [Eccl. 10:19].

Many of the rich have moved to the middle of the road. They want to be liberal and yet they want to be conservative.

Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter [Eccl. 10:20].

"Curse not the king." Regardless of our president's political party or his views, I do not feel that he should be caricatured or made an object of ridicule. In the New Testament Peter says, ". . . Honour the king" ([1Pet. 2:17](#)).

Chapter 11

This chapter gives the best course to follow for the do-gooder, for the moral man, the man who wants to live the good life and wants to go down the middle, neither hot nor cold, neither right nor left.

Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days [Eccl. 11:1].

Don't be afraid of doing good, although the reward may be late in arriving.

Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth [Eccl. 11:2].

When you are doing good, be sure to help more than one person. Help quite a few people because you may get into trouble yourself at some later time, and there will be many people who will be willing to help you.

The Lord Jesus told a parable along this line, and it is recorded in [Luke 16](#). There was an "unjust" steward who was really a crook. He made friends for himself by reducing their debts to his master, so that when he lost his job he could go to them for help.

If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be [Eccl. 11:3].

If rain is predicted, you had better carry an umbrella. After a big redwood tree falls, it is hard to move it. What is he saying here? It is best to have a clear understanding of a situation at the very beginning before you launch a venture because, after it begins, it is very difficult to make any change.

He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap [Eccl. 11:4].

That is, act wisely in what you do. If a man wants to sow seed, he had better wait until there is no wind. If a man wants to reap a harvest, he will not begin if rain is threatening.

As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all [Eccl. 11:5].

The formation of the fetus and the physical birth of a baby are still great mysteries today. Spiritual rebirth is an even greater mystery. You do not know how the Spirit will move. The Lord Jesus said that. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" ([John 3:8](#)). There is a great deal that we do not know.

I believe his point is simply this: Don't let what you don't know disturb what you do know. Let me give an example. Any person knows enough to sit in a chair. There is an empty chair in my study right now. I don't mind getting up and going over there to sit down. Now there are a lot of things I don't know about that chair. I don't know anything

about its construction -- who made it or how it was made -- but I do know that I can sit in that chair and it will hold me up. That is really all I need to know about the chair. So don't let what you don't know disturb what you do know.

Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun:

But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity [Eccl. 11:7-8].

Some day you will get old, my friend. Life for the senior citizen is not always as pleasant as the advertising folders say it is going to be.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.

Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity [Eccl. 11:9-10].

Remember, young man, now is the time to make your decisions in every category of life. It is very important that you make the right choices now. How many men have lived wasted lives and are living them today, because they made the wrong choices in their youth.

Your youthful days are empty if they are not lived right. Life is a gift that is given to us by God, given one day at a time, in fact, one second at a time. It is a precious gift, and it is to be used for the glory of God. What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

Chapter 12

We have seen the experiments that Solomon made in life. He is probably the only man who ever lived who was able to experiment in all of these different areas, attempting to find a solution and satisfaction apart from God. Throughout Ecclesiastes the key expression has been "under the sun." He tried nature and natural science as his first experiment.

A great many people today feel that they will solve their problems by getting back to nature. There is a great exodus out of the cities and into the suburbs and beyond the suburbs to a little cabin by a lake or by a river or up in the mountains. "Let's get away from it all. Let's get back to nature." Well, this didn't solve Solomon's problems, and it will not solve our problems. So Solomon tried wisdom and philosophy; he tried pleasure and materialism; he experimented with fatalism; he tried living life for self. He turned to religion and found ritual but no reality. Then he tried to find the answer in wealth. Finally Solomon tried the good life, the life of the moralist, which he found to be an insipid sort of existence. I think that is why the young people today rebel against it.

Solomon now comes to his final conclusion in this chapter.

Poetic Picture Of Old Age (12:1-12)

This chapter is going to have something for the young person and for the senior citizen. Both ends of the spectrum of life meet here.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them [[Eccl. 12:1](#)].

In view of the fact that nothing under the sun can satisfy the human heart, Solomon says, "Get back to God." While you are young, make your decision for God. It is going to be obvious why this should be done.

Solomon will paint a picture of old age, and it is not a pretty picture. Nevertheless, it is your picture and my picture in old age. When I first preached on this chapter of Ecclesiastes, I was a very young preacher, and I wondered if it would really be like this. Now I am here to testify that the description of old age in Ecclesiastes is accurate.

One often hears the liberal and the skeptic say, "I believe in a religion of the here and now. I'm not interested in a religion of the hereafter." Well, here is a religion for the "here," which means to get rightly related to God and live for Him. Why? Well, let's look at this picture he paints of old age -- a tremendous picture.

While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain [[Eccl. 12:2](#)].

Does he mean that the sun, the moon, the stars, the lights are all going out? No, he means that you don't see them as you used to.

Mrs. McGee and I took a walk when we were in the Hawaiian Islands, under a full moon, and it was beautiful. I said to her, "My, isn't that a beautiful moon? But you know, it doesn't seem as romantic as it once did. How do you feel?" She replied, "No, I don't think it is as romantic as it once was. I used to think Hawaii was the most romantic place in the world." Well, my friend, when you get old, the luster dims.

Time flies, and one sad experience follows another -- "the clouds return after the rain." When you get old, you can go out and have a great day but, believe me, you must take three or four days to rest up afterward. I have learned that.

I used to have a heavy schedule of conferences and just kept on going and enjoying every minute of it. Now Mrs. McGee and I find that we need to change our whole life-style. Conferences are becoming wearing on us. "The clouds return after the rain."

In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened [[Eccl. 12:3](#)].

This is the description of the body, the physical body, in old age. "The keepers of the house shall tremble." These are the legs. The old person begins to totter.

My staff and my close friends try to kid me by saying, "Oh, you're looking so strong and so well." Yet I notice when I get in and out of a car, they are at my elbow to help me. Do you know why? Because my legs don't move quite as fast as they once did.

When I get up in the morning and come down the steps, I groan. My wife gets after me and asks, "Why do you groan?" I tell her it is scriptural to groan. Paul tells us, "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened . . ." ([2Cor. 5:4](#)). So I tell her that I want to be scriptural. But honestly I groan because my knees hurt when I come down the steps. "The keepers of the house shall tremble."

I find that I stumble more than I used to, and I must be more careful when I climb a ladder. An old person gets himself a walking stick, and I've been thinking about that, too.

"And the strong men shall bow themselves." Those are the shoulders. They are no longer erect. My wife told me the other day, "You'd look lots better if you would stand erect like you used to stand. When you were young, you had broad shoulders, and now you are all stooped over." Well, friend, the "strong men" are bowing themselves. They don't stay back like they once did. The shoulders begin to round off, and I can assure you it is more comfortable that way.

"The grinders cease because they are few." The grinders are the teeth. You are going to lose your teeth as you get older. You will need to have some bridges put in or full dentures. I haven't had to resort to false teeth yet -- I'm thankful I still have my own -- but they have all been capped now for years.

"Those that look out of the windows be darkened" refers to failing eyesight. The other night in a restaurant a man came up to me, we shook hands, and I talked with that man for two minutes before I even recognized who he was. I just couldn't place him. I met another friend at a meeting. We talked a while and after he left, I asked my wife who he was. She told me his name. It was a man whom I had known for years. I said, "To tell you the truth, I didn't know him. He surely has changed." She said, "Yes, I think he has, but you have, too." So you see that the windows get darkened. Even with my trifocals, I don't see as well as I did. Things don't look quite as bright as they once did.

And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low [[Eccl. 12:4](#)].

"The doors shall be shut in the streets" means that the hearing is failing. My wife tells friends, "You'll have to speak a little louder. He's getting hard of hearing." I'm not really, by the way. She says that I often don't hear what she says. Maybe sometimes it is that I don't want to hear. Several years ago I had a neighbor who wore a hearing device. His wife would get after him when he got out to trim trees or prune his fruit trees. He would be up on the ladder working, and she would come out and rebuke him for it. All he did was take out his hearing aid. She would talk to him for fifteen minutes, and he wouldn't hear a word she said. Finally she would say, "I don't think you are wearing your hearing aid," and he wasn't. He would just keep on doing what he wanted to do.

Well, noise, even out on the street, is not as loud as it once was. "The doors shall be shut in the streets." And "when the sound of grinding is low." The grinding is literally the grinding women. They don't seem to make as much noise as they used to.

"He shall rise up at the voice of the bird." I can remember when I was a boy that even a loud alarm clock wouldn't wake me up in the morning. When my wife and I were young, we didn't mind the noise of children. We didn't mind the noise of music coming from the neighbors. We could sleep in motels and hotels, and none of the noises bothered us. Now even the little chirp of a bird disturbs us! Now when we travel and we come to a motel or hotel I always ask, "Can you give us a quiet room?" We are getting old, and we rise up at the voice of the bird. Any little noise disturbs our sleep.

"And all the daughters of music shall be brought low." You don't find too many older people singing in the choir anymore. The voice gets thin, and it gets harder to carry a tune. I remember dear brother Homer Rodeheaver. What a marvelous music director and song leader he was! I remember him as a young man when he traveled with Billy Sunday. How he thrilled me when I heard him as a boy. He played the trombone, sang, and led the singing. What a voice he had! Then I invited him to come to the church I pastored in downtown Los Angeles. He was in his seventies by then. I would help him up, and he would go tottering up to the platform. He was still a marvelous song leader; I don't think anyone could ever excel him. But every now and then he would sing a stanza, and my feeling was that he would have done better to read the stanza. It was no longer the glorious voice that we had heard years before.

Even the people who once had beautiful singing voices lose the quality of their voices as they get older. Those of us who never could sing very well should realize that we had better praise the Lord in our hearts. That is the reason I never open my mouth in a song service. I don't dare. I couldn't sing when I was young, and now it is positively frightful. "The daughters of music shall be brought low."

Now he continues on as he speaks of old age. And now, to me, it gets to the place where it's tragic, because we're looking at the psychological effects.

**Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall
be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the
grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man
goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets**
[Eccl. 12:5].

"They shall be afraid of that which is high." I never did enjoy flying, but I was getting over my fear and beginning to enjoy it. Then old age slipped up on me, and I find today I have the same old fear of flying that I had at the very beginning. Little things disturb me, little things that didn't disturb me at all when I was younger.

"And fears shall be in the way." We just don't enjoy things as much as we once did. We have always enjoyed traveling and have conducted many tours to the Bible lands and to the Hawaiian Islands. I have noticed that as we and our friends get older, we find traveling much more difficult. We worry and wonder about things we never even thought of before.

When we were young, my wife and I would start out in an old jalopy to go across the country. We never made any reservations. It didn't worry us if we stopped at motels and found that they were all filled. It didn't bother us if we had to sleep on the side of the road. But today there is always a nagging fear. When we get ready to make a trip, I have all the reservations made well in advance, and I go over the road map again and again and again. "Fears shall be in the way."

"The almond tree shall flourish." A blossoming almond tree is white. And the senior citizen is going to turn white on top, or else there won't be anything left on the top -- it is one or the other.

"The grasshopper shall be a burden." How can a little grasshopper be a burden? Well, when old age comes, little things that never used to bother now become a burden. We love our grandchildren dearly and enjoy having them with us, but after a while, we are glad to see them go home again. Strength fails, endurance fails, patience fails. Many little things become a burden.

"Desire shall fail." Romance is gone. You can try to act as if you are just as young as you were, but you don't fool anyone. I remember listening to an evangelist who had married a young girl. He hopped on the platform, jumped in the air, and said, "I'm just as young as I ever was." He wasn't fooling anybody but himself, and he died shortly after that.

"Because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets." That "long home" is eternity. Death is getting near.

Or ever the silver cord be losed, or the golden bowl be broken, or
the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the
cistern [[Eccl. 12:6](#)].

Here is a list of the organs of the body. At the end, they no longer function. The "silver cord" is the spinal cord. The "golden bowl" is the head, the bowl for the brain. The functioning of the brain decreases in its efficiency as one gets older, and at death it ceases to function at all. The pitcher is the lungs. "The pitcher is broken at the fountain." The wheel is the heart -- "the wheel broken at the cistern." It is no longer pumping blood through the body. All of this is a picture of the deterioration of old age leading to death. Life cannot be sustained without the functioning of these organs.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit
shall return unto God who gave it [[Eccl. 12:7](#)].

There is no soul sleep. I wish the people who try to use verses from this Book of Ecclesiastes to support their idea of soul sleep would just read on until they get to this verse. The body sleeps, but the spirit, or the soul, returns unto God who gave it.

Let me repeat that the New Testament assures us that to be absent from the body means to be present with the Lord (see [2Cor. 5:8](#)). The soul immediately returns to God. This body is just a tabernacle, or a tent, that we live in. It is just the outer covering. The soul goes to be with God.

When President Adams became an old man, someone asked him how he was getting along. His reply was something like this: "Oh, I'm doing fine, but this house I live in is

growing very feeble, and I think I'll be moving out of it before long." That was true. He did move out of his old house shortly after that.

Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity [Eccl. 12:8].

Young man, life is empty if you are just living for the here and now. One day you will find that all you have in your hand is a fistful of ashes, and you will have eternity ahead of you.

When as a child, I laughed and wept,
Time crept;
When as a youth, I dreamed and talked,
Time walked;
When I became a full grown man,
Time ran;
When older still I daily grew,
Time flew;
Soon I shall find in traveling on,
Time gone.

-- Author unknown

The psalmist writes, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" ([Ps. 90:12](#)), and Wisdom is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thinking of old age, someone has written this bit of whimsy:

Thou knowest, Lord, I'm growing older.
My fire of youth begins to smolder;
I somehow tend to reminisce
And speak of good old days I miss.
I am more moody, bossy, and
Think folk should jump at my command.
Help me, Lord, to conceal my aches
And realize my own mistakes.
Keep me sweet, silent, sane, serene,
Instead of crusty, sour, and mean.

-- Author unknown

May the Lord, give us the grace to grow old gracefully.

And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.

The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.

The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd [Eccl. 12:9-11].

We should not by any means despise the wisdom of the past, nor should we refuse to be taught.

And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh [Eccl. 12:12].

Education will not solve the problems of life.

The Result Of The Experiment (12:13-14)

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man [Eccl. 12:13].

"Fear God." This is the message of the Book of Proverbs as well as the message here. In view of the experiment made "under the sun," the wise thing is to fear God, which means to reverence, worship, and obey Him.

"And keep his commandments" would mean to meet God's conditions for salvation -- in any age -- grounded on faith in God. For Cain it meant bringing a lamb. For Abraham it meant believing the promises of God. For the people of Israel it meant approaching God through sacrifice in the tabernacle and in the temple. For us it is to ". . . Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved . . ." ([Acts 16:31](#)).

For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil [Eccl. 12:14].

"For God shall bring every work into judgment." God will judge every man, for every man is a sinner who is guilty before God. Christ bore our judgment; He died a judgment death. Our sins are either on Christ by faith in Him, or else we must come before the Great White Throne for judgment.

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Why? Well, for a very definite reason: because in the matter of salvation your chances of being saved are greater; and in the subject of service you'll have something to offer to God. Statistics show that more come to Christ when they are young.

This does not mean that old people cannot accept Christ and be saved. On one of our radio programs we gave an invitation for those who wanted to accept Christ to put up their hands. A lady walked into the room where her ninety-year-old father was listening to the program, and she saw that he sat there in the rocking chair listening to us with his hand in the air. When she questioned him, she found that he had accepted Christ Jesus as his Savior. How wonderful! It is never too late.

The second reason why Solomon makes a special appeal to young people is that they have a lifetime to offer to God in service to Him. The men who have had real service, who have had something to give to God, have been young men: Joseph, Moses, Gideon, David, Jeremiah, Saul of Tarsus, Timothy -- and oh, the host of young missionaries in the past few centuries such as Robert Moffat, who was "wee Bobby Moffat" when he came to Christ as a child and became a great missionary to South Africa.

My friend, there is no answer to the problems of life "under the sun." Jesus Christ is the only solution to the problems of life. The Lord Jesus has given His promise to people of any and all ages: ". . . him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" ([John 6:37](#)).

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